



Diocese of Helena

# Montana + Catholic + Conference



Diocese of Great  
Falls-Billings

## Testimony HB 252 Include Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Human Rights and Government Practices: House Judiciary Committee, February 16, 2009

By: Moe Wosepka, Executive Director, Montana Catholic Conference Helena Mont

Chairman Stoker and members of the committee: My name is Moe Wosepka I currently serve as Director of the Montana Catholic Conference (MCC), which represents the Roman Catholic Bishops of Montana on public policy issues. I was unable to appear before your committee today, due to a prior commitment, so I ask that you accept this written testimony in my stead.

I am conflicted with this type of legislation as I have for the past 10 plus years worked with groups who have experienced discrimination, the poor, homeless, former inmates, and others.

The MCC is not in favor of discrimination against any person in matters of employment, use of public accommodations, housing, financing or credit transactions, education or any other section of law covered by this bill. The teaching of our Church makes it clear that the fundamental human rights of all persons must be defended and that all of us must strive to eliminate any form of injustice, oppression or violence against them. Moreover, it is not sufficient only to avoid discrimination. All persons should be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity.

The difficulty is, that HB 252 attempts to amend present civil rights legislation to add an additional protected class, and therefore create the same status in law as "race, creed, religion, color, sex, physical or mental disability, age, or national origin. If we do so, we should proceed with caution, because granting of protected civil rights status is a serious matter, and should not be taken lightly. Any such additions could have wide ranging affects, and we must be careful not to oversimplify what could be serious and complex consequences.

We must also act with caution in adding a protected class to this list when we could at the same time be overlooking others who are also discriminated against. The homeless or former prison inmates are discriminated against especially in employment opportunities, and housing. I have observed many instances where they, because of the group they were identified with, were discriminated against and denied these same civil rights. The question is, do these groups rise to the level of those we currently list as protected classes? Not all of us would agree, but if you were to ask the homeless person, who lives the discrimination, his or her answer may be different than one who does not.

If these and other groups meet the level as suggested, then they too should be added to the list. It is in the very adding of each group as a protective class that the list becomes limiting in the offering of civil rights to all persons. The very nature of creating lists causes exclusivity by the deafening silence of those not included.

No person in this state should be targeted for discriminations in matters of employment, use of public accommodations, housing, financing or credit transactions, education or any other section of law covered by this bill. We are supportive of such protections, provided the common good of the entire society is also protected.

Chairman Stoker, members of the committee, it is for these reason we respectfully stand in opposition to this bill. Thank you for your time and attention.

EXHIBIT 20  
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